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An analytic empirical approach to the study of Mexicans in the United States is presented. Mexican-Americans form an important ethnic group by virtue of numbers, regional concentration, social position, and dynamic character. Findings should be amenable to comparative treatment with other status and ethnic groups.

The approach involves a series of research tasks.

The first set centers on differentiating the population with regard to its sources and migration history. Geographic origins and prior occupational and status characteristics, with special reference to the degree of industrialization and urbanization in Mexico and acculturation to Hispanic norms, are considered. Related are the nature and consequences of internal migrations, both in Mexico and in the United States.

The second focus involves the differentiation of the population according to its current socioeconomic status, urbanization, and acculturation to American norms. Objective indices should be appropriate to the range of variation found in the population studied.

The third task is a determination of the ways in which established differentials operate to produce varying modes of cultural and institutional isolation or functional integration. Three patterns of development are possible in the future: the continued isolation of relatively small homogeneous groups marginal to but dependent on urban centers; the emergence of an integrated ethnic community; or the incorporation of the Mexican-American population into the general society.

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MEXICANS IN THE UNITED STATES
A PROBLEM IN SOCIAL DIFFERENTIATION

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The conviction is generally held that the social sciences will benefit from a pooling of skills, a cross-fertilization of concepts and techniques, and a clear recognition of problems which are rightfully common properties. Indeed, the risks of disciplinary parochialism with its resultant wasteful duplication and obscure specialization are all too well known. Attempts to translate this knowledge into action are among the most important trends in social science, and in the field of Mexican studies the ground has already been laid for a convergent effort.[1]

The following statement is a product of our initial field experience and the problems of its organization. Clearly we are indebted to the concepts of economists and geographers as well as of anthropologists and sociologists, and the further implementation of the project demands continued interdisciplinary exchange. We hope that the approach suggested here will facilitate the bridging of research on indigenous groups in Mexico, on the character of urbanized Mexican society and the populations with which we are directly concerned.

The Problem of Social Differentiation

Sharp differences in the level of economic organization of two countries in relation with one another are necessary conditions for substantial population movements between them. In the case of Mexico and the United States, although these conditions have been present for some time, the migration did not take place until recently. This delay was due to two sets of facts. On the one hand, the structure of Mexican society was not conducive to large population movements until the railroad system was developed to link Mexico

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[1] This is not the place for an extended bibliographic evaluation, but the following key contributions must be mentioned: Victor S. Clark, "Mexican Labor in the United States," U. S. Bureau of Labor Bulletin, No. 7, 1908, Manuel Gamio, Mexican Migration to the United States, Chicago, 1930, and The Mexican Immigrant: His Life Story, Chicago, 1931; Paul S. Taylor, Mexican Labor in the United States, University of California Publications in Economics, Vols. 6 and 7, 1928-30; Governor C. C. Young's Mexican Fact-Finding Committee, Mexicans in California, San Francisco, 1930; and the La Follette Hearings of U. S. Congress, Senate, Committee on Education and Labor, Subcommittee on Senate Resolution 266 to Investigate Violations of Free Speech and Rights of Labor, 1940. There has been no recent documentation of comparable stature, and a comprehensive examination of the position of the Mexican-American populations is overdue.

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with the world market, about the end of the nineteenth century.[2] On the other hand, the demands of the American economy, at various stages of development, were largely satisfied by the historic pattern of European immigration. The developing demand for labor in the American Southwest coincided with the availability of Mexican migrants, who arrived in largest numbers between 1909 and 1929. At this point in history the crest of Mexican migration seems to have passed, and we are entering a period of critical importance for the adjustment of Mexicans in American society.

The twentieth century Mexican immigrants found already established in the United States an indigenous Spanish-speaking population of long standing. This group, localized in the Southwest, was a legacy of the land accession of the nineteenth century. The Mexican-American population is differentiated on the basis of this fact, and we must postulate that the position of the old residents will differ from that of the recent immigrants. This differentiation is relevant because interregional population movements continue to be important despite the declining significance of the international migration of Mexicans. The question of internal migration is more obscure than the international phase and requires detailed investigation. We must provide for differentiating the old (i.e., Spanish colonial) and the new Mexican-American population, and the main points of analysis which we shall state below offer the basis for such differentiation.

Apart from the gross distinction indicated here and those variations related to regional characteristics such as the pattern of institutionalized segregation in Texas, the task of differentiation requires intensive locality and aspectual investigations. A rounded interpretation is at this time frustrated by the sharp limitations in detail of knowledge about the Mexican-American population in Southern California, its locality of highest concentration and differentiation.

We phrase the following discussion under four main headings: (1) economic function and mobility, (2) acculturation and urbanization, (3) status and assimilation, and (4) modes of isolation in integration.

Economic function and mobility. The bulk of the Mexican migration to the United States originated in the Mesa Central and was heavily weighted with laborers from village and town environments who had some familiarity with a technology more advanced than did the peasantry of the lowland agricultural areas. The other important source of migration was the more recently developed area bordering Texas, which provided a supply of seasonal as well as permanent migrants.[3] As viewed from Mexico this was a secondary movement. The literature does not document the migration differentials, and we are not prepared

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[2] Bernard Moses, The Railway Revolution in Mexico, San Francisco, 1895; Frank Tannenbaum, The Mexican Agrarian Revolution, New York, 1929

[3] Clark, op. cit., pp. 466, 468.

readily to assess the adjustment of populations deriving from different social situations. The question remains one meriting investigation and even now some light might be thrown upon it. New studies of Mexican society indicate a social and cultural heterogeneity within localities in addition to the well-documented differences among culture areas. The determination of differentials in status and function, especially in reference to relations with the land, is relevant to phenomena underlying population movements and important in interpreting the adjustment of the migrants.[4]

Irrespective of the origin and prior occupational history of the immigrants, they entered the American labor market as common laborers in mass employment situations. Characteristically, this employment -- whether agricultural, e.g., in the sugar beet fields, or industrial, e.g., in construction operations or in railroad maintenance -- was periodic and migratory.

The problem is to determine the extent to which the population has left migratory labor, become occupationally differentiated, improved its position with respect to stability of employment, and achieved vertical mobility. A first basis for comparing the indigenous and immigrant populations of Mexican Americans lies in the answers to these questions. More broadly, the problem is one of establishing the position held by the populations in the industrial system and the hierarchy of occupations, their rate of movement, and a basis for predicting their future statuses. An essential condition for handling these questions is the development of histories of industrial experience in key areas of Mexican-American employment. These include furniture, electrical trades, and garment manufacture, in which Mexican Americans are found throughout the hierarchy of skills and which are currently expanding fields of employment for them. Developments in the white-collar category are important for reasons of symbolic value and relative stability, and therefore have a greater significance than the number of workers involved. Job histories obtained in the course of locality studies will establish the relationship between occupation and other social characteristics of enclave populations.

Acculturation and urbanization. A number of factors have converged to retard the acculturation of Mexicans in the United States. The pattern of mass employment in which Mexicans worked in homogeneous gangs tended to insulate them from contacts with other ethnic groups. Although this was by no means peculiar to Mexicans, it is unlikely that gang employment was experienced by any other population in so many occupations and for so long.

Their position as casual laborers, linked with instability of employment and frequent migration, resulted in residential and institutional isolation. Both in rural and urban areas the ethnic enclaves were marginal neighborhoods

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[4]The question of variability in "folk" cultures has been raised in a series of reports on the restudy of Tepotzlan. See especially Oscar Lewis, "Plow Culture and Hoe Culture: A Study in Contrasts," Rural Sociology, 14: 116-27, 1949. For the definitive statement of the folk culture position see Robert Redfield, "The Folk Society," American Journal of Sociology, 52:293-308, 1947.

detached from the life and economy of the large community, although dependent upon it for jobs and services.

Under these circumstances the language barrier which initially was an obstacle to relations between the group and American society became a persistent symbol and instrument of isolation. The language barrier effectively isolated a large part of the first generation and was an important factor in reducing the rate of naturalization. The second generation, very often confronted with learning English upon entering school, still suffers from retardation.[5] Where no legal segregation existed the size of the Mexican population made possible administrative segregation. Retardation, in turn, imposed an educational ceiling on the group with vicious circle consequences: limited schooling retarded acculturation, set arbitrary job ceilings, constricted job opportunities, and the group became symbolized by its stereotype.

In all populations where the immigrant group is predominant among adults, the strata of acculturation are age structured. The cleavage in the case of Mexicans in Southern California has gone so far that the second generation has become isolated from the parental group but has not secured access to the larger society. The formation of gangs of Mexican youth is an obvious manifestation of this condition. Through these gangs a critical period of the life span of the individual is ethnically delimited. Because of the cleavage from the parental generation and the age determination of youthful associations, the second generation enter adulthood with a dearth of appropriate models. Not all of the second generation, of course, become gang organized, and this fact is a further basis for differentiation in so far as it conditions relationships with the parental generation and such institutional forms as the school.

A necessary approach to this segment of the topic lies in the differentiation of the population on a typological continuum of acculturation. The continuum should be designed on operational principles which would permit cultural variation to be related to other scales based on population characteristics. To establish the relationship between acculturation and urbanization we propose to use a scale of urbanization which has already been constructed.[6]

Status and assimilation. At first glance the constricted status of the Mexican-American group impresses the observer. Within the urban status system they occupy an apparently undifferentiated position, socially excluded, economically depressed, and politically powerless. Unlike other important American ethnic groups a middle class providing service functions is virtually nonexistent. Those individuals who have advanced substantially, either economically or in educational status, have tended to lose their identity with the group and have moved away from the ethnic enclaves which are entirely lower class. This

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[5] To place this in context and avoid any deterministic implication it is well to note that the smaller Japanese population manifest no such retardation despite the far greater linguistic gap. The difference between Japanese and Mexican educational practices and valuations were the proximate causes of this difference in experience.

[6] Eshref Shevky and Marilyn Williams, The Social Areas of Los Angeles, 1949, expecially Ch. IV.

movement is facilitated by the alternative definitions of "Spanish," "Colonial," "California," and the like, which do not carry the stigmatizing connotation of Mexican. The availability of alternative definitions provides a ready rationalization both for vertically mobile individuals and the host population and undoubtedly acts to reduce stress in transitional adjustment. In a higher status context the Spanish name carries even a prestige value and this is in contrast to the assimilating Jew, who often is confronted with the problem of name changing. Granting the economic and cultural prerequisites, color is the only arbitrary qualification to a ready change in Mexican self-definition. Vertical mobility and loss of identification as Mexicans should theoretically be easier for those who approximate the "Castilian type." It also remains to be discovered to what extent the factor of color is selective in affecting the permanence of settlement in the United States and the secondary movement of Mexicans in this country.

Some of the conditions present which might lead to development of further status differentiation of the Mexican Americans as such are ethnic nationalism as expressed in the concept raza, Mexican patriotism, culturally modified Catholicism, and a persistent interest in the ancestral culture, this last finding reinforcement in the friendly attitudes toward Latin America shared with the general population. The convergence of these and other factors could conceivably result in the assimilated and vertically mobile elements remaining within the ethnic group.

If then the status distribution of Mexican Americans so identified is very narrow, the problem of internally differentiating the relatively homogeneous population presents technical difficulties. These might be solved by performing a more meticulous assessment of occupational function,[7] job stability, specific material possessions, and community functions than is done in broad schemes of status analysis. The validation of such objective criteria may well proceed through the operational verification of status judgments and sentiments.

Modes of isolation and integration. Unlike the classic form of the Black Belt and European immigrant settlements, Mexican-American urban neighborhoods are not large, continuous concentrations. The initially diffused utilization of this segment of the labor force, in Southern California at any rate, gave rise to a number of relatively small homogeneous nuclei, marginal to but dependent upon the urban centers and those subcenters performing industrial functions. Many of the disparate settlements were engulfed in the growth of the city, but were hardly modified by their change in relative position. Los Angeles, with the largest industrial concentration in this region, attracted the largest population of Mexican origin. Peripheral communities of seasonal agricultural workers are being changed by the processes of urbanization into marginal neighborhoods of urban workers. This change and the tendency toward a greater urban concentration and localization have manifold sociological consequences which

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[7] For an applicable treatment see W. L. Warner et al., Social Class in America, Chicago, 1949, pp. 140-41.

are the preconditions for further differentiation of the population and for their mobilization for political action on a scale heretofore impossible.

Three main patterns of development are possible in the future: (1) the continued isolation of atomistic enclaves; (2) the emergence of an integrated ethnic community; (3) reduction in the isolation of the Mexican-American population, their incorporation in the larger society, and the progressive liquidation of the ethnic enclaves.

The effectiveness of any program designed to ameliorate the status of the group may be assessed by the way it influences the trend of development in one of the indicated directions. At least the more overt kinds of institutional manipulation may be readily evaluated in these terms. Here we interpolate our opinion that a progressive reduction in the isolation of Mexican Americans should be the central objective of social action.

Under present conditions of isolation the service facilities of the group are rudimentary. For the most part, they are supplied by self-employed persons who operate marginal commercial enterprises functionally isolated from the mass economy. The chief service area catering to the Mexican-American population is located in the deteriorated urban center of Los Angeles. All important Mexican-owned enterprises are found here and, with all the risks involved, this is the entry point for independent commercial activity. The professional and semiprofessional personnel are also concentrated here, but the number and diversity of services rendered are even less adequate than is the case in Negro and Japanese-American neighborhoods.

Correlative with isolation and weakness are deficiencies of available capital and technical and professional skills. These conditions impede the integration and effective organization of the group. There is a dearth of personnel with sufficient resources or technical skills competent to cope with the bureaucracy of business enterprise or government. Strong leadership is unavailable either for periods of group crisis or for enduring community organization.

We specify four important criteria for the assessment of future trends in this sphere: (1) the accumulation of capital available to the ethnic group; (2) the training of a corps of skilled personnel in the professions, semiprofessions, and commerce; (3) the operation and control of the Spanish language press and other mediums of ethnic communication; (4) the emergence of leadership capable of coping with government on its several levels, including the achievement of public office.

The indigenous forms of organization are not now adequate to integrate a large part of the population or establish relations with the larger community.

But early in the history of Mexican immigration mutual aid societies performed important functions within the group. Taylor refers to them as follows:

> Sociedades and the mutualistas are local societies, or lodges of the mutual benefit type customarily set up by Mexicans in the United States. They are supported by small monthly dues and pay modest sick benefits to members. These societies represent the only continuous organized life among the Mexicans in which the initiative comes wholly from the Mexicans themselves ....
>
> The societies provide a forum for discussion and a means of organizing the social life of the community. In this respect their importance transcends the benefits which they extend to their members in case of illness.[8]

Despite the early significance of the mutual aid societies and the persistence of some of them over a period of years, they do not appear now to have any important place. Without exception, large immigrant populations in the United States developed this type of organization as an early and transitional form. In some cases the functions became incorporated in an institutional system within the ethnic group.[9] Thus far, at least, this does not seem to have taken place among the Mexican Americans despite the fact that the group has remained isolated and in large part culturally distinct.

Like the mutual aid societies the first trade unions with Mexican leadership were a transitional form. Although their original leadership participated in the series of agricultural strikes of the 1930's, no effective organization persisted. Incorporation of Mexicans in any numbers into the American labor movement awaited the development of stable industrial unionism in areas of Mexican employment. No other secular organization appears at this time to be capable of affecting so decisively the pattern of Mexican isolation. Depending on the composition of the "locals," unionization may have important bearing on the rate of acculturation, the character of interaction between Mexicans and other groups, and their participation in civic and political activities.

The church is the principal agency of cultural conservatism for Mexicans in the United States and reinforces the separateness of the group. This is true, whether one has in mind the parish organization of the Catholic Church or the Protestant missions with their functionally sectarian attributes. Competition between the church and the mission reveals and accentuates cleavages in the Mexican population and is an obstacle to consensus. When Mexicans become participants in Protestant denominational or nonethnic Catholic organizations the phenomenon is an aspect of vertical mobility and does not affect the isolation of the group.

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[8]Taylor, op. cit., Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 185 (emphasis supplied). For fuller descriptions of these societies see Vol. 6, No. 1, pp. 61-64, and No. 5, pp. 358-60; Vol. 7, No. 2, pp. 131-42.

[9]Cf. Louis Wirth, The Ghetto (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1928).

SUMMARY

We have attempted to specify an analytic empirical approach to the study of a most important ethnic group which by virtue of its size, regional concentration, social position, and dynamic character merits detailed and comprehensive study. Although directed at one population, our formulation is intended to yield findings amenable to comparative treatment with other status and ethnic groups.

In the light of the foregoing, we indicate a series of research tasks which may comprise a coherent program.

1. The first set of tasks centers on the problem of differentiating the population with regard to its source and migration history. Here we consider the geographic origins of the population and prior occupational and status characteristics, with special reference to the degree of industrialization and urbanization in Mexico and acculturation to Hispanic norms. Related to all of these are the nature and consequences of internal migrations both in Mexico and in the United States.

2. The second focus of research involves the differentiation of the population in respect to its present socioeconomic status, urbanization, and acculturation to American norms. We need objective indices of these characteristics so contrived that they are appropriate to the range of variation found in this population.

3. The third is a synthetic task: to determine the ways in which the established differentials operate to produce varying modes of cultural and institutional isolation or functional integration, and we postulate three types: (1) the continued isolation of atomistic enclaves; (2) the emergence of an integrated ethnic community; and (3) reduction in the isolation of the Mexican-American population, their incorporation in the larger society, and the progressive liquidation of the ethnic enclaves.